

*The Excellency of the Gospel, as suited to
the Poor:*

A

S E R M O N,

Preached at **SALTERS'-HALL**, April 11th, 1777,

Before the Correspondent Board in London

Of the

SOCIETY in SCOTLAND,

(Incorporated by Royal Charter)

For propagating Christian Knowledge in the **HIGH-
LANDS and ISLANDS**, and for spreading
the Gospel among the **INDIANS** in America.

By **ANDREW KIPPIS, D. D.**

(Published by Request.)

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the Book

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By ANDREW KIPPER

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S E R M O N.

MATTHEW xi. 5.—The last Clause.

—*The Poor have the Gospel preached to them.*

THE text is part of the answer which our Lord gave to the question of the disciples of St. John the Baptist, who had been sent by their master to ask Jesus, whether *He* was the person that should come; that is, whether *He* was the Messiah, or whether they were to look for another. It hath been matter of conjecture among learned men, what could be the motive of the Baptist in making this inquiry; since he had before given the most express testimony to the divine character of Christ, and had been informed of it by inspiration from Heaven (*a*). Perhaps

(*a*) Matth. iii. 13, 14, 15. John i. 26. 36.

the most probable solution of the difficulty is, that John was disgusted at being kept so long in prison. He might think himself of greater importance than to be thus neglected; and might suppose, that he could be useful in still farther preparing the way for the Christian dispensation. The message, therefore, which he sent to Jesus, might be intended as a reproof to him, for not interposing in his behalf. He might imagine that Christ, who performed so many miracles for the benefit of others, scarcely acted suitably to his character, in doing no extraordinary work in order to extricate his forerunner from confinement. This account of the matter is favoured by what our Saviour hath observed, in the words immediately following the text; "and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

But whatever might be the meaning of the Baptist in the question he proposed, our Lord's answer was such as clearly manifested his own divine authority; and it was calculated, at the same time, to make John acquiesce in his conduct, though he did not interpose to rescue him out of prison. "The blind, saith Jesus, receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached

“preached to them.” That the literally poor, the poor in external circumstances—are here spoken of, seems to admit of very little doubt, and is acknowledged by the best commentators. Taking the text, therefore, in this sense, we shall, in farther treating upon it,

First, point out the argument which hence arises in favour of Christianity.

Secondly, shew how suitable the Christian dispensation is to the meanest of mankind; and then apply the subject.

We are first to point out the argument in favour of Christianity, which arises from our Lord’s having preached the gospel to the poor. It is as a proof, or confirmation, of his divine mission, that our Saviour hath mentioned it, among other particulars: and, therefore, it must, in that view, deserve our attentive consideration. And,

First, Our Lord’s having preached the gospel to the poor, is an argument in favour of Christianity; as it was a completion of some of the ancient predictions concerning the Messiah. If the twenty-ninth chapter of Isaiah contains a prophecy of Christ, as several learned men have believed; in that case, the regard which would be shewn, by the gospel, to the lowest ranks of persons is particularly specified, in the 18th and

19th verses. " And in that day shall the deaf
 " hear the words of the Book ; and the eyes of
 " the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of
 " darkness. The meek also shall increase their
 " joy in the Lord, and the poor among men
 " shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel." A
 passage something like it, though expressed in a
 different manner, we have in the thirty-fifth chap-
 ter, from the fifth to the ninth verse ; where, I am
 persuaded, there is a direct reference to the evan-
 gelical times. " Then the eyes of the blind
 " shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall
 " be unstopped. Then shall the lame leap as
 " an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing :
 " for in the wilderness shall waters break out,
 " and streams in the desert. And the parched
 " ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty
 " land springs of water.—And an high way
 " shall be there—and it shall be called, the
 " Way of Holiness :—the way-faring men,
 " though fools, shall not err therein." By
 way-faring men, in this place, persons of the
 meanest condition, as well as the meanest abi-
 lities, seem to be intended. Again, in the
 sixty-first chapter, and the first verse, the Messiah
 is prophetically introduced, as saying, " The
 " Spirit of the Lord is upon me ; because the
 " Lord hath anointed me to preach good tid-

“ings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind
 “up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to
 “the captives, and the opening of the prison
 “to them that are bound.” What is here rendered, “He hath anointed me to preach good
 “tidings to the meek,” was, in the ancient copies, “He hath anointed me to preach good
 “tidings, or the gospel, to the poor;” a slight variation having since taken place, in the form of a single letter. Accordingly, it is thus translated in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament (*b*); and by St. Luke in his quotation of the passage, ch. iv. ver. 18. And it is highly probable, that there is in the text a direct and especial reference to this passage.

But Isaiah doth not appear to be the only prophet, who hath touched upon the favour which should be manifested, by the Christian religion, to the lowest ranks of men. In other parts of the Old Testament, there are places to the same purpose; though, because the discussion of them would lead us to some critical inquiries which would take up too much of our time, we shall not mention them at present.

We may here add, that it is the general doctrine of the prophetic writings, that the dis-

(*b*) Ευαγγελισσασθαι πτωχοις.

penfation of the Meffiah would be calculated to enlighten, comfort, and blefs every condition of mankind; the neceffitous as well as the wealthy, the mean as well as the mighty. Since, therefore, our Saviour particularly addreffed himfelf to the low and the indigent; and it was expreffly foretold concerning him, that he fhould do fo, this is a confirmation of his divine miffion. It is one proof, among many others, that he answered to the character and description which had been given of him in the ancient predictions of the Old Testament; and that he was, indeed, the Chrift.

But, in the fecond place, independently of prophecy, the circumftance itfelf of his preaching the gofpel to the poor, is an argument in favour of his f acred authority. The views of an impoftor muft undoubtedly be directed to his prefent advantage. His aim muft be to gratify his vanity, his fenfuality, his ambition, his avarice, or fome other bafe and wicked paffion. Now, in order the more effectually to fucceed in his worldly defigns, he will naturally endeavour to engage the affluent and the powerful in his caufe. Should it, indeed, happen that he cannot get accefs to the great, or obtain any influence over them, he may have recourfe to the poor: but then it will be only in fuch a manner

ner as to make them instrumental of carrying on his iniquitous purposes. But there was nothing of this kind in the conduct of our blessed Saviour. Had he been disposed to render the common people subservient to any schemes of human grandeur, he might, considering the universal expectation which the Jews had then formed of a glorious temporal monarchy, and their general propensity to rebel against the Romans, have done it with ease. Nay, we know that they actually intended to appoint him their king; and, if he had not escaped out of their way, they would have used force to oblige him to assume the title (c). Our Lord's addressing himself, therefore, to the poor, in the method in which he did address them, is a strong evidence that he could not be a deceiver. He applied to them with no other view than to promote their happiness. Instead of paying a particular courtship to the chief priests and the rulers, he rebuked them with the utmost severity for their pride, their hypocrisy, their fraud, their covetousness, and their oppression; while to the persons who were in low and mean stations, he exercised peculiar humanity, compassion, and gentleness; and, whenever they came to him for relief, he spake to them in terms of the most

(c) John vi. 15.

endearing tenderness. Nor did he content himself barely with kind expressions, but displayed his goodness in actions equally kind; instantly hastening to their assistance, and working a vast variety of miracles, in order to expel their pains, sooth their sorrows, and provide for their necessities.

It was not their temporal distresses alone which the Saviour drove away from them, or their temporal wants only which he supplied. No, his mercy to the poor was manifested in infinitely more important instances: it was manifested in holding out to them the words of life and salvation. To *them* he communicated those sacred lectures of truth, wisdom, and duty, which are the most valuable treasures of knowledge that were ever revealed to the world. To *them* he rendered those offers of pardon, which, to offending and guilty creatures, are so absolutely necessary. To *them* he gave those promises of a divine assistance which our own weakness, and the numerous temptations we are surrounded with, make so desirable and so useful to our perseverance in holiness. On *them* he conferred those glorious privileges of being the people and children of God, which constitute our highest honour and our sincerest joy. To *them* he opened that doctrine of immortality which

which is our most reviving cordial, our fairest hope, our richest inheritance. All these great and mighty blessings hath Jesus bestowed upon the poor. He hath preached the gospel to them; that gospel, the distinguishing characteristic of which it is that it contains glad tidings; the glad tidings of light, forgiveness, consolation, and everlasting happiness; and which must be allowed to be the best tidings, and the most suitable to the necessities of mankind, that were ever delivered.

Our Lord did not, indeed, address himself to the poor exclusively of the rich: for his invitations were given to all ranks of men, and his religion was designed for the benefit of every one, whether high or low, who should be disposed to receive it with a suitable temper of mind. But still, during the course of his ministry, he paid an especial regard, and afforded the clearest marks of tenderness and condescension, to the common people. He allowed for their infirmities, levelled himself to their capacities, and fully verified his own declaration, that he "came not to be ministered unto, but "to minister (d)." That the Saviour could have no base, or selfish, or worldly ends, in the course

(d) Matth. xx. 28.

of

of action he pursued ; that he neither could, nor did obtain any temporal advantage by preaching the gospel to the poor, is plain from the whole tenour of his life and doctrine. On the contrary, he exposed himself to difficulties and hardships, to contempt and reproach, to the rage and persecution of powerful enemies ; and, at length, he deigned to suffer an ignominious death on the cross. Since, therefore, our great Master could not have any secular views in offering the blessings of his revelation to the poor, let us lay our hands upon our hearts, and ask what are we to think of his character ? Can we suppose that a person of so disinterested a disposition, and who displayed such a condescending regard to the meanest of mankind, in preference to the wealthy and the potent, was a Deceiver ? We cannot, if we attentively reflect upon the matter, make such a supposition. The circumstance mentioned in the text doth, in itself, form a strong presumption, that Jesus was, what he is declared in the New Testament to be, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the World.

We may add, thirdly, that the conduct of the Redeemer, in preaching his gospel to the poor, will appear extremely amiable, if we compare it with the conduct of other teachers, whether profane or sacred. That several of the

the philosophers were sincere inquirers after truth, and designed, by their lectures and writings, to promote the advantage of their fellow-creatures, cannot reasonably be doubted. It was not, however, usual with the best of them, Socrates excepted, to address their discourses to the common people. Cicero expressly tells us, "That philosophy is content with a few judges, it being her nature studiously to avoid the multitude (*e*)."

The leaders of the schools, and heads of sects, taught the tenets of their respective moral systems to none but the great, the wealthy, and such as had a liberal education. These alone they thought deserving of being enlightened; and looked upon the rest of mankind as a stupid herd, who ought to be left in ignorance, and governed by superstition.

The behaviour of our great Master was, also, very different from that of the Jewish doctors in his own time. It was their character to despise the people; and they carried their arrogance to such an amazing height, that we are informed of their having had a proverb among

(*e*) Est enim philosophia paucis contenta iudicibus, multitudinem consulto ipsa fugiens.

Tuscul. Quæst. l. 2. § 1.

them,

them, which declared, that the Spirit did not rest upon any but a rich man (*f*). Need we say, that the temper of Christ, in conferring his extraordinary gifts upon the poor, was directly contrary?

Even the inspired prophets of the Old Testament, were sent much to kings and magistrates, and were greatly employed in messages and predictions which related to the rise and fall of states and empires: whereas the Son of God opened his scheme to illiterate fishermen, addressed his sacred lessons to the multitude, made the happiness of individuals his care, and invited the meanest to partake of his doctrine and his salvation. When, therefore, we compare the conduct of our Saviour with the conduct of other teachers, we see an excellence in his disposition, and a condescension and benevolence in his deportment, which strongly confirm our persuasion of his heavenly character, and his divine authority.

We proceed to shew,

Secondly, how suitable the Christian dispensation is to persons of the meanest understanding, and in the lowest situations. Out of a great variety of thoughts which might here be insisted upon, we shall select such a number

(*f*) See Grotius upon the text.

only, as will be sufficient to evince the truth of our proposition.

And, first, the suitableness of the gospel to the poor, appears from the perspicuity, plainness, and force with which its principles and precepts are delivered. Allowing that, in the New Testament, there are some doctrines the whole of which we cannot entirely comprehend; and some reasonings, especially in the epistles of St. Paul, very difficult to be understood; the observation doth not affect our general assertion. All the truths of holy writ which are essential, or even useful to our salvation, and all the commands resulting from these truths, are set before us in the clearest terms; and in a manner which is adapted to the most common capacity. With regard to the doctrines of Christianity, have not our blessed Lord and his apostles declared, in the plainest language, the unity, perfections, providence, and moral government of God; the life to come, the general resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and other things of the highest importance to our eternal happiness? As to the precepts of the gospel, are they not delivered with a clearness, ease, and conciseness which, unless we are strangely blinded and perverse, cannot be mistaken?

It

It is an additional and mighty advantage, that the declarations and dictates of the New Testament are recommended and enforced by the absolute authority of the Supreme Being. As this was an advantage which the philosophers wanted, their labours were hence rendered of little effect. Not to mention that their systems and rules were founded on the credit of reasonings, which were far from being always conclusive, and which, when they were conclusive, were by no means capable of being universally comprehended; could they even have given a scheme of religion and morality that was established on the most solid proofs, and expressed in the most perspicuous manner; still they would have had no sufficient method of obliging man to embrace it, as the director of their understandings and their conduct. The utmost they could have done, would be to argue, to exhort, and to persuade; but to COMMAND, would have been wholly out of their power. Now, it is the excellence of our Saviour's revelation, that it neither rests its doctrines and precepts on the foundation of abstruse and laboured arguments, which, however just, would not have been attended to by the generality of mankind; nor merely on the clear and easy way in which they are expressed; but on the

the absolute authority of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, as being appointed, by a divine commission, our teacher, lawgiver, and sovereign. This is a method which is calculated to strike upon every breast, and to influence every rank and condition of people. When the Supreme Being sends forth his mandate; when our Lord speaks in the name of the eternal Father, and confirms his words by a mighty miracle, the lowest understanding apprehends the meaning of the declaration, and feels the force of the command. It submits, without difficulty, to what comes recommended in so cogent a manner.

That the principles and duties of the gospel are not ranged in an exact and systematic order, but are incidentally brought in, without regard to strictness of method, is another great advantage to persons of inferior capacities and stations. Some, who have hence objected to our holy religion, have only shewn their ignorance of human nature. The seemingly loose way wherein the doctrines and precepts of the New Testament are exhibited, their mixture with history and facts, and their being occasionally introduced, are the very things which constitute their beauty and usefulness; the very things which render them obvious and striking

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to the meanest abilities: whereas, if they had been proposed in a strictly logical and rhetorical arrangement, they would have required an attention that would have been extremely unsuitable to the bulk of mankind, and the reading of them would have been much less pleasing. While the most beautiful regular composition, after it hath been read a number of times, is apt to lose its novelty, and to cease from charming us as it did at first; the evangelical and apostolical writings derive, among other sources, such an eternal variety from the manner in which they are drawn up, that we are never fatiated with the perusal of them.

The method, also, which Jesus had of conveying his instructions by similes and parables, made his sacred lessons peculiarly affecting to the generality, and especially to the poorest and meanest, of his hearers. By borrowing his images and comparisons from the objects around him, and by thus addressing to the senses, as well as to the understandings of his auditory, he powerfully engaged their attention. Indeed, with respect to his similes and parables, as they were admirably fitted for imparting truth to the mind, so they were happily adapted for causing it to *abide* there, which is a circumstance of the last importance; since it is much more difficult
to

to make persons *feel* and *retain* religious doctrines than to gain a speculative assent to them. It might easily be shewn, from various instances, that our Saviour's figurative way of communicating his heavenly lectures was excellently calculated to fix in the soul a deep and lasting impression of the principles taught by him: but for the full proofs of our assertion, we can only refer you, at present, to the histories of the evangelists.

Secondly, The suitableness of the gospel to the poor appears from its examples. The more we know of human nature, the more shall we be convinced of the efficacy of example. Examples, as setting a lively picture before the lower ranks of men, are peculiarly adapted for their instruction and improvement. The patterns held out to us have that attractive and affecting excellency which belongs to our Lord's images and comparisons, of being an address, not to the understanding only, but also to the senses. Now, all the benefits which can arise from example may be met with in revelation. The crimes of the abandoned, the failings of the sincerely pious, and the attainments of the eminently good, communicate a variety of important truths and sentiments. Doth not the treachery of Judas, for instance, strongly ex-

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hibit

hibit the danger of too close an attachment to the world, the necessity of guarding against the first approaches of vice, the aggravated condemnation which results from offending against superior light, and the misery that inevitably attends a course of unrepented guilt? Doth not the fall of St. Peter, while it teaches us the folly and hazard of self-confidence, and the importance of fleeing from temptation, call us to the duties of penitence, watchfulness, and prayer?

But these are warnings, not patterns. On the other hand, the accomplishments and graces of the distinguishingly holy are very instructive and engaging. The excellence of St. Peter, in other parts of his character, the beautiful simplicity and tender benevolence of St. John, and the wonderful attainments and virtues of St. Paul, by affording fine proofs of the temper and conduct we should study to cultivate and maintain, have a mighty tendency to allure and to affect our souls.

But the particular, the supreme glory of the gospel in this respect, arises from an example every way perfect, every way fitted to impress and attract the mind; and that is, the example of the blessed Jesus. Do we want to know how it behoves us to act, in our passage to
another

another world? we may clearly learn it from our Saviour's spotless pattern. Do we desire to be informed how we should deport ourselves in the season of affliction? we may easily discern it in his consummate patience and fortitude. Do we wish to preserve a perseverance in well-doing, a steadiness under temptations, a consolation and courage in the day of distress and persecution? we may imbibe them by consulting the life of the Redeemer. His temper and behaviour not only tell us, in a manner adapted to the dullest capacity, what should be our own temper and behaviour, but engage us, by the strongest ties, to a like disposition and practice. The reflection upon what our divine Master did and suffered, will be found more effectual than all the exhortations of philosophy; and, indeed, than any precepts separately and independently considered. For the powerful impression of the truths arising from his example, has an admirable tendency to purify the heart, and to carry us forward in the religious course. His virtues, manifested in his actions, dispense lessons so palpable to men of the meanest abilities and stations, as to strike upon them at once, and to let them instantly behold " what manner of

“ persons they ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness (g).”

Thirdly, The suitableness of the gospel to the poor, appears from its principles being communicated by a series of facts. Examples are undoubtedly a species of facts: but we here more generally mean, besides the patterns which are set us by intelligent beings, such other incidents, whether relative to men or things, as are fitted for the conveyance of useful sentiments. As facts hold out instructions more forcibly than words, the Supreme Governor hath so ordered it, that the revelations of his will should not merely contain a system of doctrine and duty, but a history of his providential dealings with the children of Adam. He hath spoken to his reasonable offspring by certain events, which have fallen out in his administration of the world; and by the way in which, according to their moral conduct, he hath treated nations or individuals. Now, this is a method of proceeding so well fitted to the meanest understanding, and to the lowest condition of mankind, that it might justly be said, “ He may run that readeth it (b).” Thus the accounts we have of the creation, the deluge, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,

(g) 2 Peter, iii. 11.

(b) Habak. ii. 2.

the behaviour of Jehovah to the Jews, and the prosperity or adversity of that people, carry in them a variety of weighty lessons.

But to come to the New Testament: the events which relate to the blessed Jesus communicate important religious principles in a much stronger manner than could have been done by language alone. What a noble idea doth it afford us of the compassion of the eternal Father, when we reflect that his love to mankind was so great, as to send his Son for the purposes of their salvation! What an illustrious testimony do the miracles of Christ give of the divine power, and of his own supernatural authority! How evidently do they shew that he is to be believed in without hesitation, and obeyed with reserve! How prodigiously full of instruction, consolation, and hope is the death of our Lord! How brightly doth it display the truth of his mission, the excellency of his character, the certainty of the covenant of pardon and grace, together with all the other invaluable blessings which he hath revealed and dispensed to human creatures! Yes, the dying affection of our great Master, whether we consider it as a confirmation of his sacred gospel, a noble pattern of suffering fortitude, the decisive act of his obedience to the Father, or a ratification of forgive-

ness to the truly penitent, abounds with the grandest, the most desirable and rejoicing informations and discoveries. Do not, also, his resurrection and ascension furnish an evidence of a future state of immortality and glory, which is so far from depending on precarious conjectures and laboured reasonings, that, by being rendered palpable to the senses, it involves in it no obscurity, and frees the mind from every degree of doubt?

Though I could wish to enlarge upon these thoughts, it must suffice to have only so far mentioned them, as may authorize me to appeal to every one of you, whether the events referred to are not better fitted to enlighten the lowest capacities, and to impress religious sentiments efficaciously upon the breast, than could, otherwise, have been done by the best composed system of doctrine and duty. We shall just add, that the Lord's Supper, which is a standing fact, in commemoration of the death of Christ, is finely adapted to fix in the soul the most valuable truths and affections. While those who are unacquainted with human nature may cavil at the institution, such as know the springs of the mental frame will ever admire the wisdom of an ordinance, which hath the happiest tendency to keep alive the principles

ciples and dispositions that are incumbent upon us, as the disciples of Jesus.

Once more; fourthly, The suitableness of the gospel to the poor appears from its consolations, motives, and rewards. In such a state as the present, where we are surrounded with temptations, and exposed to afflictions; and where the larger numbers of mankind occupy the inferior ranks, so that they have not ability, opportunity, or leisure, for close inquiries and laboured deductions; it is of inexpressible importance to have those comforts and assistances, which, as soon as proposed, may be apprehended and felt in all their energy. Now, these are the very things which are dispensed to us by the Christian revelation. The arguments which philosophy affords, are by no means sufficient to calm the generality of men, when they suffer under heavy calamities: nor, perhaps, would they usually have much effect on persons of a more refined and liberal education. However, with regard to the common people, what would it avail to tell them, in the period of distress, that the order of nature cannot be altered, that pain is no evil, or to mention the other topics upon which the Stoics insisted? But should you lead them to the supports of the gospel; to the declarations that all events, however distressful, shall conduce to

our real benefit ; to the assurances of a superior aid ; to the consideration that “ the afflictions of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed,” and that they shall work “ out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (*i*):” Should you point them to the courage and conduct of the eminent saints in former ages, and especially to the matchless fortitude of that divine Redeemer who, for the joy which was set before him, “ endured the cross, and despised the shame (*k*) ;” you would lead them to something that is not only highly animating in its own nature, but which hath actually animated the weakest to endure a great fight of trials and sufferings, and enabled them to excel the most illustrious characters of the pagan world.

So, likewise, when temptations press hard upon mankind, will it much signify to talk to the lower ranks concerning eternal fitnesses and relations, the dignity of moral rectitude, and the beauty of virtue ? God forbid that I should speak with any view of depreciating matters which I think it extremely right and useful, at proper seasons, to insist upon. But, in an hour of strong allurements to sin, they will not, they cannot, be so effectual as the motives of our holy religion. No, if you would propose what

(*i*) Rom. viii. 18. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

(*k*) Heb. xii. 2.

is really fitted to work upon the human heart, what is really adapted to persons of the meanest abilities and circumstances, you must propose to them the promises of divine help, the privileges they enjoy by the gospel, the victories which a firm belief in its principles hath obtained in all ages, and the unparalleled conquests of the exalted Redeemer. These noble assistances, which are displayed in the New Testament, enable us, if they be properly made use of, to repel the fiercest assaults; especially, when we take into account the everlasting crown of honour and blessedness which awaits the persevering disciples of Jesus. The prospect of such a glorious resurrection, and such an astonishing, such an unspeakable, such an unmerited reward as Christianity offers, may well make temporary evils seem so light and insignificant, as to render us superior to the warmest opposition in the way of our duty. Indeed, it is the excellence of the gospel, that it addresses to all the passions of our frame; that it speaks to our fears as well as to our hopes; that it applies to our gratitude, our love, our shame, our desire of applause, and to every other principle within us which is capable of being engaged in the cause of piety. It is the excellence of the gospel, that the arguments urged by it, instead of being philosophical refinements, are such weighty, affecting, and popular

pular considerations as may be apprehended and felt by the meanest of mankind.

I cannot dismiss the subject without observing, that the Christian dispensation is suitable, in all the respects we have mentioned, to the great and the wealthy. The great and the wealthy are not naturally endued with better understandings than the poor; and though their opportunities for improvement may be superior, it frequently happens, that, in consequence of their not making a right use of them, their intellectual and moral powers are far from being duly cultivated. They do, therefore, equally stand in need of a doctrine which is plain, obvious, and striking, to every capacity.

Nay, we may add, that the most profound philosophers, and the most learned men, will derive more advantage, satisfaction, and certainty from the gospel, with regard to some of the grand articles of religion, than they could be able to do from the closest researches and reasonings of their own minds. After their most accurate examination of things, it is in the gospel that they will find the clearest knowledge, the firmest supports, and the noblest prospects. Every day they will be more and more sensible how much they are indebted to the revelation of Jesus; and a few declarations of the New Testament, upon
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any important religious subject, established, as the authority of the New Testament is, upon irrefragable evidence, will appear more valuable than all the arguments of human wit. Nor will they think thus because they undervalue the faculties which God hath given them; or because they despise, or even deem lightly of any of the methods by which truth is communicated to the world: but because a repeated perusal of the writings of the apostles and evangelists, joined with a comparison of them with the best productions of antiquity, will have convinced them that Christianity is the surest spring of light and hope, consolation and happiness.

And now, from what hath been said, we may perceive, in the first place, that God is the friend and benefactor of all ranks of men, without exception. That the Supreme Being hath manifested, in this world, the same real regard for the *low* which he has done for the *high*; and that he hath as amply provided for their welfare, will be evident upon an attentive consideration of the matter. Were we, indeed, to judge of the condition of mankind merely by external appearances, we might be ready to imagine, that the superior stations are much more happy than the inferior ones. The rich are surrounded by so many conveniencies, have so many

many things at their command, and can so easily gratify their desires, that we can scarcely help looking upon their state as vastly preferable to *that* of the poor. But if we fairly examine the truth of the case, there will not be found such a prodigious difference as is, at the first view, apparent. Though Divine Wisdom hath seen fit to constitute a considerable inequality in the degrees and orders of men, the same inequality is not made in their happiness. In the grand essentials even of temporal felicity, the poor are upon a level with the rich. They have the same enjoyment from health, the same satisfaction from the indulgence of their natural appetites: nay, as their health is not impaired by indolence, but improved by exercise; and as their appetites are not palled by luxury, but whetted by labour, their pleasures, in this respect, are often greater. Indeed, the advantages which the wealthy partake of, are not felt and enjoyed by them with so keen a relish as we may be apt to imagine. By long use, their superb habitations, their capacious and beautiful gardens, their splendid equipages, their numerous attendants, are regarded with the utmost indifference; so that it is only our being unacquainted with the state of their minds, which inclines us to suppose, that a peculiar happiness is annexed to their condition.

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But however the matter may be with relation to the present life, can we say that God is not the friend and benefactor of the lower, as well as of the higher ranks, when he hath conferred upon the lower ranks the most important blessings of his goodness; when he hath given them those spiritual mercies which insure their solid, their supreme, and everlasting welfare? Hath he not shewn his condescension, kindness, and impartiality towards them, in the whole of the Christian dispensation? Nay, did he not bestow upon them distinguished honour, in appointing them to be the instruments of spreading the religion of Jesus among the nations? What though the poor are not surrounded by the affluence, the splendours, and the dignities of life? They are encompassed with infinitely nobler and more valuable benefits. They are rendered partakers of the instructions and privileges of the gospel, and are called to be heirs of the kingdom of Heaven. They may, therefore, be well assured, that God is as much their God, their Guardian, and their Father, as he is of the rest of mankind. Hence we may discern,

Secondly, That it is extremely sinful to despise the poor. Some, who are favoured with the gifts of fortune, and raised to the superior ranks

ranks of life, look with such contempt on those who are below them, that they are almost ready to regard them as beings of another species. But a temper of this kind is highly unreasonable and wicked. What are the mighty advantages, on account of which the great and the powerful are apt to swell with pride and haughtiness? Are they not advantages which are totally foreign to their inward worth? Are they not even the meanest of external advantages? For as to strength, health, and beauty, in what respect are the rich better than the poor? They do not possess a more athletic vigour of constitution, a sounder temperament of body, or an exacter symmetry of form; but, perhaps, may be much inferior in regard to these benefits. And then, as to the endowments of the mind, can they boast a finer genius, or quicker capacities, than their neighbours?

But the Almighty, besides providing for the low, as fully as for the high, in the most essential parts of temporal happiness, hath invited the poor to the blessings and honours of the gospel. They are become "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ (1)." Hence St. Paul, speaking of Onesimus, who was a slave, exhorts his master Philemon to receive him, not

(1) Rom. viii. 17.

only as a servant, “but above a servant, a brother beloved (*m*).” Hence, likewise, St. James observes, “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he had promised to them that love him (*n*)?”

Be far, therefore, O ye wealthy! from despising those who are, equally with yourselves, the rational off-spring of the Supreme Being, the objects of his favour, and partakers of the heavenly calling! However contemptibly you may *now* treat them, the period will arrive, when, if they have been sincerely pious and virtuous, they shall be owned and applauded by the eternal Father, and the exalted Saviour. The period will arrive, in which every distinction being levelled to the ground, but that which arises from inward goodness, *they* shall be crowned with glory; while you, if ye have died in unrepented guilt, shall be loaded with infamy, and consigned to destruction. What, shall those be the objects of your scorn, to whom God and Christ have manifested such an especial regard? It would, surely, be the height of insolence and impiety.

Thirdly, The poor may learn, from what hath been said, to be contented with the station

(*m*) Philemon, ver. 16.

(*n*) James ii. 5.

in which Providence hath placed them. As the rich are too ready to indulge a haughtiness of disposition, so persons in low circumstances are too apt to repine and murmur at their condition. But this, my friends, is a temper very unsuitable to the submission and acquiescence which you owe to the wise and gracious Governor of the universe. And it is a temper which there is very little reason for, considering the infinitely important benefits which you enjoy. Though you are not entitled to the pomp, the parade, and the possessions of the present world, you are entitled to a wealth, an inheritance, and a glory, inexpressibly more valuable. Despising, with such hopes, and such prospects, the gaudy vanities of life, you may remain easy and satisfied in that humble station, which God hath marked out for you; secure in this, that the virtues which you *now* exercise in silence and obscurity, will, one day, be acknowledged and rewarded, by your benevolent Creator, in the face of men and angels.

Would you see a fine example of the manner in which you ought to walk, look to the behaviour of St. Paul. He was vastly superior to yourselves in attainments and graces; and he was exposed to much superior evils. He was exposed not to poverty alone, but to the utmost severity

severity of distress; and the fiercest fury of persecution; and yet, with a view to the honours and benefits derived from the gospel, he could say, “ I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, “ therewith to be content (o).”

But I can point you to a higher pattern still; the pattern of our Blessed Saviour. Notwithstanding the unequalled dignity and excellence of his character, he submitted, with consummate resignation and cheerfulness, to the meanest circumstances. “ Though he was rich, yet for “ your sakes he became poor (p);” and endured the sharpest sufferings, without a complaining word, or an impatient sentiment. Having, therefore, so beautiful, so engaging, so divine a picture to copy from, be persuaded to attain, as much as possible, its complete likeness.

Fourthly, The poor may see, from the doctrine of the text, that religion is not above them. That religion is above them, is a notion which is too often taken up by persons in low stations. They are ready to suppose, that, as their time is so much, and so necessarily, employed in providing for their subsistence, they have not leisure, and that it will not be required of them, to mind the concerns of their salvation. But

(o) Philip. iv. 11.

(p) 2 Cor. viii. 9.

this is a most unhappy and dangerous mistake. For there are virtues suited to their situations, which they are under the strictest obligation to cultivate. Indeed, they can have no excuse to plead for the neglect of their spiritual and eternal interests; because they enjoy *that* gospel, which is exactly adapted to their necessities; which affords, in the plainest language, the knowledge and comfort they want; which points out their duty in the clearest words; and which urges them to the practice of it, by motives and assistances that can easily be understood, and powerfully felt.

Be persuaded, therefore, ye my friends, whom Providence hath placed in meaner ranks of life than some of the rest of your fellow-creatures, to behave according to the advantages with which you are favoured. You have souls to save, as precious, as immortal, as the souls of the greatest dignitaries upon earth; and you have the revelation of Jesus Christ to help you forward in this infinitely momentous object. With such instructions, with such aids, as are there set before you, you can have no apology for disregarding the concerns of another world. Let me, then, beseech you, instantly to engage in the securing of your eternal salvation. In applying, with all your heart, and mind, and strength,

strength, to the pursuit of piety and goodness, you will experience the noblest satisfaction. If ye be devout, modest, temperate, contented, and obedient in general to the divine will; if ye be rich in faith and holiness, you will assuredly find, that, though you are poor in this world, God, who is no respecter of persons, will highly honour, and liberally reward you at the day of judgment.

Once more, fifthly, Since the gospel is so happily suited to persons of all conditions, we should frequently peruse, and diligently study it ourselves; and should endeavour to promote the knowledge of it among others. Such an invaluable treasure being put into our hands, would it not be shameful, would it not be wicked, to let it lie by us, without making use of it? The New Testament can only be of service to us by being read with care, and reflected upon with seriousness. The constant perusal of it is of much higher importance and utility, than the perusal of any other books, though of a religious nature. Allowing, which must certainly be allowed, that there are a variety of extremely beneficial works upon spiritual subjects; our chief attention should still be fixed on those sacred writings, the distinguishing characteristic of which it is, that they are able to render us wise unto salvation. As it is to be

feared, that many professing, and even sincere Christians, do not maintain that constant correspondence with the Holy Scriptures which is incumbent on them, I would earnestly exhort them to correct so pernicious an error. I would earnestly exhort them to pay a greater regard to the words of God than to the words of men; to consider the Bible as the only standard of their faith, and the only authentic rule of their lives; and to look there for their instruction, consolation, hopes, and prospects. When we reflect that, by such a course of action, they will be growing in wisdom, in holiness, in charity; and that they will be training up for the kingdom of complete and endless light, purity, harmony, and blessedness; can any persuasions be necessary to urge them to a conduct which will be attended with effects so unspeakably beneficial and delightful?

Nor should we only read the gospel ourselves, but be solicitous to encourage an acquaintance with it among others. We should endeavour, as far as in us lies, to render the knowledge of what is so inexpressibly excellent and important as widely extended as possible: and there will be found the greatest reason for the utmost exertion of our zeal in this respect, when we consider the vast multitudes who have not the means, without extraordinary aid, of coming

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at the invaluable treasures contained in the sacred records. It must strike every lover of Jesus and of souls with concern, that the revelation so admirably designed and adapted for the benefit of the poor, should, by their very poverty itself, and the other disadvantageous circumstances attending their situations, be withheld from them. This, surely, is a case which calls, if any thing can, for our friendly interposition, and compassionate assistance. To relieve those who are in the affecting condition we have specified, is the purpose of "The Society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge *in the Highlands and Islands*, and for spreading the Gospel among the Indians in America;" and the bare mention of the design carries along with it the strongest recommendation. It must appear, on the very face of it, to be one of the most laudable and important schemes that can solicit our protection and favour. Indebted as we are to the gospel of Christ, deriving from thence our firmest hopes, our sublimest comforts, and our views of eternal blessedness; in what can we better testify our gratitude for the rich mercy which our Maker hath shed upon us, than in being anxious that others may partake of the same mercy? In what work can we

engage which is equally honourable and useful?

The peculiar importance and necessity of the institution before you, must, upon the most transient survey of the unhappy situation of the persons who have been its prime objects, be apparent to every discerning and benevolent mind. The inhabitants of the remotest northern parts of Britain, and of the circumjacent islands, long laboured under every possible temporal and spiritual disadvantage. As their country was intersected and divided by mountains, rivers, gulphs, bays, and arms of the sea, and had not the proper methods of communication, they were precluded from an intercourse with their civilized neighbours. The means of internal improvement were obstructed by the barrenness of the soil, the severity of the climate, and a poverty which was not accompanied with a spirit of industry. This state of rudeness and barbarity was fostered and increased by such a prevalence of the feudal system, in its worst and most rigorous forms, as rendered the natives little less than the absolute slaves, in their properties, their bodies, and their minds, to the chieftains of their several clans. With regard to religion, numbers of them were either brought up in a pagan

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ignorance, or held in subjection by the absurd tenets, the abject superstitions, and the tyrannical impositions of the church of Rome (*q*). In this respect, as well as others, their condition was very different from, and vastly beneath that of their brethren in the low lands; where the inferior ranks are remarkably distinguished from the common people of most nations, by their acquaintance with the Scriptures.

Such, for a great length of time, was the wretched state of our fellow-subjects in the north of Scotland; and the attempts to remedy it were partial, defective, and inefficacious. But, at the opening of the present century, a wise, rational, and permanent plan was formed for establishing charity schools in the Highlands and Islands; and methods were used for procuring a fund towards carrying into execution so valuable a design (*r*). The proceedings of the Society, by the blessing of Divine Providence, have been attended with very considerable success. Having been encouraged by two royal patents, and supported by the legacies, benefactions, and subscriptions of pious and well-disposed Christians, it hath arrived to a state of great and extensive utility. The Society

(*q*) See the large Account of the Society, p. 1, 2.

(*r*) Ibid. p. 4.

hath three objects in view, each of which, singly and separately considered, is so highly important, that to promote it might well demand our warmest patronage, our most cheerful and liberal contributions. The first of these objects is to train up the rude and ignorant inhabitants of the Highlands and Islands, in the knowledge and principles of the Christian and Protestant religion; the second is, that they may be formed to the industrious exercise of agriculture, handicrafts, manufactures, and other useful arts of life; and the third is, the spreading of the gospel among the Indians in America. Upon the last of these heads, I shall not at present particularly insist. For though I consider it as a matter of unspeakable moment; though I most sincerely wish, and fervently pray, that the Light and Truth of Jesus may be communicated to every dark and savage gentile nation; though I think that such a scheme ought to be pursued with the utmost assiduity and ardour; though I do cordially rejoice in the success, which, by the means of Dr. Daniel Williams's bequest (s), and some far-

(s) This gentleman, who was a dissenting clergyman in London, left certain lands and tenements to the Society, for the specific purpose of attempting the conversion of Infidel countries.

ther aids, the Society hath had in proclaiming the Saviour's name among the Indian tribes; though I should be thankful for increasing success and support in this respect; I am, nevertheless, still persuaded, that the other parts of the plan, while, at least, there is so much room and so much necessity for assistance in them, are the more direct and principal objects of our concern. And, indeed, I cannot easily conceive of objects which call in such loud and pathetic terms for our compassion and benevolence. There are now, in the several schools of the society, nearly eight thousand children of both sexes. These 8000 children are rescued from pagan darkness or Popish bigotry; and are put into the way of becoming enlightened Christians, true Protestants, useful and happy members of the community, peaceful and loyal subjects of a free government, and heirs of eternal blessings. When, besides these 8000, we contemplate the numbers who have already been instructed, during the course of the century; and the much larger numbers, who, we trust, will be instructed in future years, what a noble scene presents itself to the imagination! It is a scene which a feeling mind cannot look upon without rapture. Neither
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can we reflect upon it, without being inspired with the warmest zeal for the support of that charitable institution which points us to so grand and rejoicing a prospect; which confers such prodigious benefits on public society, and on private persons. For what can be a greater advantage to public society, than to have it composed of men who, instead of living in idleness and rapine, or attempting to destroy the peace and liberty of their common country, shall cultivate the ground, practise the useful arts, open new sources of commerce, and contribute to the riches, the prosperity, and the defence of the nation to which they belong? And as to private persons, what language can express the value of being rescued from ignorance, indigence, and slavery; of being rendered industrious, sober, just, holy, and devout; of enjoying the comforts and pleasures of social life, and the privileges and hopes of the gospel; in short, of being happy here, and infinitely happy hereafter?

But though much good hath been done, and much, we hope, will continue to be done, there is, nevertheless, a great deal which remains to be accomplished, and the society stands in need of still more liberal and effectual support. I see
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with concern, that it is by no means capable of carrying its excellent purposes fully into execution.

It has been found necessary to drop the schools in some places; and it has never been in the power of the Committee of Directors to erect them in a large number of other places, where they are greatly wanted. This is a case the more deeply to be lamented, as Popery is extremely prevalent in many parts of the country. And what must grieve every real Protestant is, that this degrading and baneful superstition, which, among other evils, withholds the scriptures from the poor, increases to an alarming degree. At the same time, the funds of the society are not sufficient to procure missionaries and schoolmasters of such education and knowledge as shall qualify them for opposing, with due advantage and success, the pernicious designs of the Popish emissaries (*f*). It is, therefore, most earnestly to be wished, that the Directors were enabled to give appointments which would induce young preach-

(*f*) This information the Author received from Mr. Mackintosh, Secretary to the Correspondent Board in London; whose successful assiduity and zeal in promoting the benevolent designs of the society, entitle him to the peculiar approbation of the Directors.

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ers, or other persons of considerable talents, to attend in those parts where the seminaries of the church of Rome are established. But as this can only be effected by an increase of subscriptions and benefactions to the charity, it is a matter which, I am persuaded, you will take into serious and affectionate consideration. Our love to our native country, our love to the uncorrupted religion of Jesus, strongly demands it at our hands.

Thus, in whatever view we reflect upon the object before us, new arguments rise up in its favour; and I might go on to recommend it by additional motives. I might endeavour to open all the springs of tenderness, compassion, and benevolence in your breasts: but when I consider the manifest importance and excellence of the institution which now claims our attention, I cannot think it necessary to use many exhortations, in order to engage your generous contributions. To imagine that many exhortations are necessary, would be doing injury to your characters. It would be supposing that you have no affection for your fellow-creatures and fellow-subjects, no regard for their temporal and eternal interests, no value for the gospel, no gratitude for the inestimable benefits you enjoy by Jesus Christ. But I am
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sure that the better dispositions which animate your souls have, this day, brought you hither. You love the scriptures so well, and have, I trust, felt so much of their power upon your own hearts, that you will be extremely solicitous for their honour, and will eagerly seize the opportunity of spreading abroad the light of life. Is it not delightful to think upon, that, by the blessing of the Almighty on your charity, the inhabitants of the most distant corners of Britain and the British isles will be civilized and enlightened; and that they will be praising the Father of Mercies, for the riches of his grace, dispensed to them by your bounty? Permit me to indulge the transporting prospect, that, by the enlargement of that bounty, there will not, at length, be a single place in the country which is left destitute of the means of instruction and improvement; not a single place in the country but what rejoices in knowledge, in cultivation, in industry, in social happiness, in the possession of the gospel, and the hopes of immortality.

The sacrifices I now recommend are the sacrifices with which God is well pleased; which he will highly approve and bountifully reward. Such sacrifices it will be your joy to offer; and it is my fervent prayer, that, under the influences
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of the Holy Spirit, your hearts may be opened, on the present occasion, in a manner becoming those who have a real regard for the glory of their Creator, the interest of their Redeemer, the temporal welfare of their countrymen, and their final and complete blessedness in the realms of eternal light, purity, and perfection. Amen!

F I N I S.



